

Wmagazine

After Hours: Full House

The mixing of plebeians and black tie cavalry is a common sight at most ballet gala performances—the dance portion is always open to a larger multitude than will attend the preceding fancy dinner, so such oil and water pairings are common. But at the American Ballet Theatre Fall Gala Tuesday night, the separation was even more apparent. Ballgowns, sequins and tuxedos speckled a crowd of t-shirts, jeans and striped sweaters.

“I didn’t realize there was a gala going on,” said a woman of the latter camp as a floor-length black dress walked by her.

Her confusion was understandable. The evening marked ABT’s return to the renovated New York City Center (as opposed to Lincoln Center’s Metropolitan Opera House, where it has performed in past seasons) and as such, there was less fanfare, no step-and-repeats or red carpets, just balletomanes of all ilk melding in one smaller venue.



Mary-Louise Parker and Charlie Mars

This was not a bad thing. In fact, it was rather lovely. Mary-Louise Parker and her musician boyfriend Charlie Mars went virtually unnoticed in aisle orchestra seats and City Center’s intimate space allowed for an equally intimate program including “The Garden of Villandry,” Twyla Tharp’s “Sinatra Suite” (with costumes designed

by Oscar de la Renta) and the world premiere of Demis Volpi's rather sexually suggestive "Private Light," that had male and female dancers in a gender neutral uniform of just blue shorts (the girls wore nude leotards to give the appearance of toplessness). By the time the performance ended with Tharp's electrifying "In the Upper Room," featuring black and white striped and red costumes by Norma Kamali and Philip Glass' score, the crowd was one.



From left: Fe Fendi; Blair Husain

"Philip Glass is a genius—it's ageless, so much energy," enthused Fe Fendi as we exited the theater and headed towards buses to drive us bar mitzvah style to the dinner at the Plaza Hotel.

"I like anything red," joked her husband, Alessandro (whom it should be noted paid equal attention to the dancing itself).

Parker and Mars were making their way up the red carpeted Plaza stairs just as I arrived. Turns out, Parker's seven year-old son is quite the dance enthusiast.



From left: Joanne de Guardiola; Muffie Potter Aston

"My son really likes Pilobolus," she said of the modern company. "He's been going to dance since he was three

and half and he's normally a regular seven year-old who can't sit still. But when he goes to the theater, he's kind of astonishingly composed."

Parker has something of history with ballet herself, having taken it for twelve years (along with Russian folk dancing, rather bafflingly). But she begged off any ideas that she might be guarding latent talent.



Dinner at The Plaza

"I was not good at either one. I just did it for a long time," said the actress. "I had to have something to do when I was in high school. I didn't have a social life."

How things have changed. The Plaza's Palm Court was a scene of flower-bedecked tables, flickering candles and guests trying to find their seats—or something else.

"There's no bar?" said one distraught woman as she looked around in anguish.



From left: Zang Toi and model Natalia Costa; Sarah Arison and Prince Dimitri of Yugoslavia

Oh, it wasn't that bad. The speeches were short and sweet—co-chair Muffie Potter Aston gave an intro and Matthew Rubel was presented with the Melville Straus Leadership Achievement Award. Then we all dug into our goat cheese salads and steaks as the dancers arrived, including Gillian Murphy, a principal who was in "In the

Upper Room,” in which thanks to Kamali’s designs, she had sported sneakers instead of toe shoes.

“You don’t have to point your feet,” she said. “I love high heels and it’s much easier to wear them after dancing in sneakers.”

Photos: BFA/ Joe Schildhorn

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